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ABSTRACT

A wave of new thinking about success, opportunity, and responsibility has given rise to new ways of evaluating work opportunities based on their ethical practices, management models, and measures of social and environmental responsibility. Taken together, these ideas form a foundation for emerging socioeconomic visions of sustainable development. Sustainability is often discussed in terms of a "triple bottom line" of social, environmental, and economic results, and is supported by a growing body of research in accounting and management aimed at measuring these results so that they can be operationalized in real-world business settings. This chapter provides career counselors with a practical orientation to the paradigm of sustainable enterprises, defined as those that meet today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same. The chapter reviews: principles of sustainable enterprise, and efforts to apply them in today's businesses; emerging occupations and industries connected with this new way of doing business; changes in existing industries; and issues and methods for counselors. (GCP)

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by

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The Sustainability Imperative: Trends, Jobs, and Implications for Career Counselors

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Introduction

American industry is in the midst of a dramatic wake-up with regard to the costs of poor ethical practices and faulty corporate governance, and the need to address the social and environmental impacts of business and industry. A wave of new thinking about success, opportunity, and responsibility — developed over a generation by forward-thinking companies in partnership with researchers and advocates — has given rise to new ways of evaluating work opportunities based on their ethical practices, management models, and measures of social and environmental responsibility. Taken together, these ideas form a foundation for emerging socioeconomic vision of sustainable development. Sustainability is often discussed in terms of a "triple bottom line" of social, environmental and economic results, and is supported by a growing body of research in accounting and management aimed at measuring these results so that they can be operationalized in real-world business settings. This session provides counselors with a practical orientation to the paradigm of sustainable enterprises, defined as those that meet today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same. The session will review:

- principles of sustainable enterprise, and efforts to apply them in today's businesses;
- emerging occupations and industries connected with this new way of doing business, and how to investigate them;
- changes in existing industries, and how to investigate them;
- issues and methods for counselors.

Goals of the Session

The goal of this presentation is to orient counselors to the sustainability imperative with a basic definition and vocabulary, along with a thorough, research-based overview of implications for major industries and occupations, and to suggest counseling responses framed in terms of three basic reasons why these issues matter to our clients:

1. *Managing risk.* Ethical, social and environmental blind spots regularly give rise to risk exposure that affects the profitability and longevity of firms, as shown by the sector-by-sector

studies of Innovest Strategic Value Advisors (www.innovestadvisors.com, 2002). As entire economic blocs, such as the European Community, enact higher environmental standards than the U.S. has yet achieved, American companies must make adaptations (such as designing computers to meet European standards for reduced toxicity and recyclability) or lose major market shares. What is bad for communities and the planet cannot indefinitely continue to be good for business, or for employment.

2. *Seizing opportunity.* Today, *Fortune's* list of "100 Best Companies to Work For" is filled with businesses formed to meet social needs, from Bright Horizons (child care) to Fannie Mae (affordable housing). Toyota's hybrid Prius and BP's growing solar energy division are examples of businesses built on providing alternatives to climate-altering fossil fuels. Knowledge of emerging markets in these arenas, as well as regulatory incentives, can give our clients a distinct advantage in finding employment niches in a tight job market.

3. *Reaffirming values.* In the tough economic conditions of spring of 2002, when *Monster.com* asked ordinary job-seekers whether they cared about finding work that somehow helped make the world a better place, 29% described this goal as very important. Attention to values helps our clients position themselves where they can bring the most energy and vitality to work. In the current tense international and economic climate, keeping values alive is more essential than ever.

Conclusion

We conclude that, in spite of the complexity of interpreting and applying it, the basic concept of "sustainability" can be understood by counseling professionals and by job seekers across the spectrum of occupations and industries. When this vision is personalized in light of an individual client's values and priorities as well as talents and personality, it can be used to sharpen the focus of a job search while increasing the client's motivation and hence resilience.

Content Summary

Sustainable development is a concept with an evolving definition. One of the most widely used is from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987): "...to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Building on this, we offer a simple definition of a sustainable career as one that provides a meaningful livelihood, while at the same time helping in some respect to enhance the quality of life in human communities, and to protect and restore the environment.

Industries: Contributions to sustainable development can be found in virtually every industry, starting with three that cross-cut the rest of the economy:

> Materials recycling and re-use, and industrial "eco-design," which involves a shift to less toxic inputs, less materials intensity, and design for disassembly and recycling of components (already done by some makers of office machines, automobiles and other

heavy equipment). Recycling a ton of municipal solid waste creates nine times as many jobs as landfill disposal. Occupations in this arena include collection, disassembly, re-engineering, remanufacturing, training, assembly, quality assurance, marketing and brokering, finance. Growth sectors include textiles and building components.

Energy conservation and renewable sources including wind, hydroelectric, biomass, solar and geothermal. A scenario developed jointly by the World Wildlife Fund and Tellus Institute predicted that aggressive climate protection using a shift to conservation and renewables could create on the order of 870,000 new jobs by 2010. Jobs exist for designers and operators of new technologies; meteorologists and geologists to detect renewable sources of energy; residential and commercial auditors to identify inefficiencies and identify strategies for savings; installation and maintenance technicians; architects and contractors.

Natural resources protection and restoration is a substantial cluster of fields employing ecologists and technicians, information technology professionals, mechanical and civil engineers, policy analysts and administrators, economists, technology research and development staffs (working in such areas as water purification, soil decontamination, and cleaner manufacturing processes), surveyors, landscape designers, greenhouse and nursery workers. In land reclamation alone, the Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Program has created 1,400 cleanup jobs and 5,000 redevelopment jobs on newly available lands, leveraging $2.3 billion while providing job training and other assistance to disadvantaged populations.

Industrial manufacturing today is in the midst of reducing negative environmental and health impacts through the adoption of cleaner technologies (www.cleanedge.com). Three of the largest service industries further illustrate the connection between sustainable development and employment opportunities:

The natural food industry is growing by 10 - 20% a year, with federal standards for organic production just implemented last year. Since food retail and service represents 8.6% of the work force, there is opportunity for many to be part of a shift to food supplies that are better for people and the environment, whether as the chef in a gourmet natural foods restaurant, a brand manager for new organic products, or technical staff in an agricultural extension service to help farmers adopt these new methods effectively.

Tourism, the economy's 3rd largest retail industry, has increasingly recognized the impact that it has on communities from a cultural, social, economic and environmental standpoint. Heritage tourism, ecotourism, green building practices in the hotel and entertainment industry, and transportation alternatives from trains to trolleys can mitigate damage and increase benefits while keeping this industry innovative. Jobs range from eco-tour guides to architects to socially conscious travel agents.

Health care employs 1/9 of the work force and generates $1 in every $7. Hospitals and medical practices are reducing their use of toxic materials such as mercury and polyvinyl chloride, seeking alternatives to incineration of medical wastes, and increasing the availability of holistic alternatives from natural childbirth to hospice care which can reduce costs and side effects while enhancing patients' choice and control. Emerging

jobs range from basic materials research to environmental management in hospitals and medical practices.

Occupations: The sustainability imperative is giving rise to new occupations, many at the boundary between enterprises and the stakeholders their operations affect. Niches ranging from small to sizeable, these occupational categories represent a wide range of skills and seniority levels, in many cases containing meaningful career paths from entry to senior. To name a few: corporate ethics officer, vice president for corporate giving, environmental manager, social impact auditor, organic farm certifier, carbon emissions trader, transportation planner, socially responsible investment broker, restoration ecologist, native plant nursery manager, telecommute coordinator, materials broker.

In addition, many professions have given rise to serious "social and environmental responsibility" movements that expand conventional definitions of the profession's role. These are illustrated by the role of psychologists and educators in addressing community violence prevention; physicians tackling public health issues from smoking to environmental toxins; and biologists providing expertise to local planning departments to protect wildlife habitat and ecosystem health.

Finally, in ordinary business organizations, conventional functions are being re-interpreted in light of newly understood responsibilities beyond financial metrics. We review ten common ones that are found across the economy:

1. Administration - Establishes overall mission and vision oriented toward a triple bottom line. Establishes key financial, social and environmental performance indicators and overall strategic vision for balancing them.
2. General Management - Implement the mission and vision in daily operations.
3. Information Systems - Collects a broader range of information for triple bottom line planning and governance. Designs and applies new data management tools including mapping and simulation to help decision makers see long-range and immediate impacts.
4. Customer Service - Seeks out customer input on ideas, products and services that support the organization's mission and TBL success. Takes a proactive approach to customer concerns, especially those that could be early warning signs of negative impacts needing attention.
5. Marketing - Integrates images and values connected with community and environmental benefits into business promotions for both external and internal purposes.
6. Manufacturing/Production - Implements the vision and strategy through a sensitive balance of efficiency and innovation.
7. Accounting/ finance. Incorporates state of the art methods for full-cost accounting (measuring, for example, costs of negative health impacts or work force displacement), supported by social and environmental auditing and increased transparency of communication with stakeholders.
8. Sales - building a bridge between company and customers based on value added through sustainable practices.
9. Research and Development - Envision and conceptualize new products and services that reflect the TBL vision.
10. Human Resources - Incorporates the full mission and vision into recruitment and interview process thereby creating a more seamless overlap between organizational and employee values. Provides training and education to help every employee play an active role in TBL practices.

Promotes social justice within the workplace, and develops pension plans that reflect socially responsible investment guidelines.

Completing the exploration of industries and occupations, we briefly identify the major information sources and codes of practice for social and environmental responsibility. These include generally applicable codes such as the CERES Principles (www.ceres.org); SA 8000 standard (www.sa-int.org); and Aspen Institute's Corporate Social Impact Management system (www.aspeninstitute.org). They also include specific codes of ethics and best practice for industries ranging from forest products to chemicals to banking.

The diversity and complexity of these choices ensures that there will never be a "one size fits all" approach to sustainability in career development, but instead that counselors and clients will be required to consider more aspects of the available choices. Rising to this challenge, we argue, is an elegant way to help clients focus and refine their searches, so that a little more up-front homework pays off in the form of a much better fit between the client and the available opportunities.

Counseling: Traditional models of career counseling help clients explore their skills, values, personality and preferences for work setting to assist the process of finding a career and building a life that uses their gifts in satisfying ways. Career counseling oriented toward sustainability adds a new and potent element: exploring the impacts of work choices on a whole range of stakeholders, from loved ones to customers to communities and future generations. Reporting on research within our private practices and additional efforts by colleagues, we sketch out approaches using critical thinking, imaginative and expressive techniques, supported by mapping tools for organizing the options. We affirm the importance of taking seriously the notion that human beings develop in a social and environmental context, and that paying attention to this context helps build not only virtue but satisfaction and resilience. We adapt common exercises, such as values inventories and reviewing critical life incidents, to the exploration of clients' social and environmental values. We explore the use of multiple intelligence theory[1], focusing especially on the emotional, aesthetic and naturalistic intelligences that support people's unique responses to the state of the world. We pay special attention to the developmental conditions that are required for adults to be able to see themselves as contributors to the greater good,[2] including ego strength, empathy, and reflexive self-awareness; and also to the existential conditions that are needed, such as a degree of lifestyle balance and material suffiency, and some form of social support system[3] .

"But I'm just one overworked professional!" We end with a realistic look at ways to integrate this new paradigm into professional practice, by means of new decision tools, collaboratives to divide the labor of tracking trends, group-based work with clients, and new ideas from the audience.

Notes

[1] Gardner, Howard (1993). *Multiple Intelligence: The Theory in Practice*. New York: Basic Books.

[2] Kelman, Herbert and V. Lee Hamilton (1987). *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[3] McKenzie-Mohr, Doug and William Smith (1999). *Fostering Sustainable Behavior*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

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